

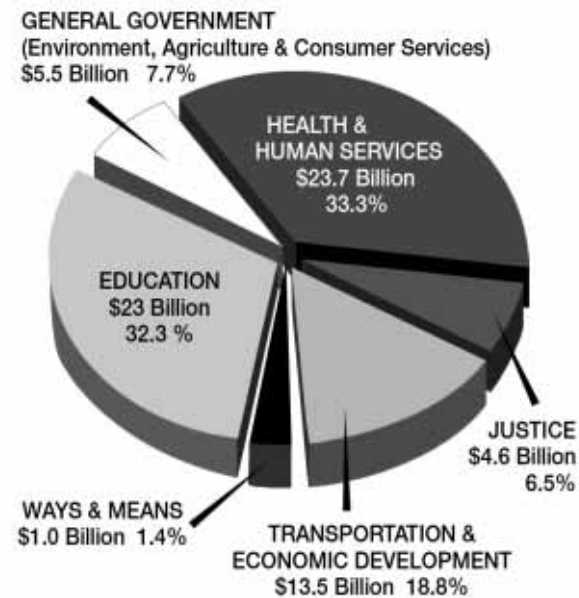
– FUNDING ISSUES continued –

- \$300,000 for Hurricane-Related Elderly Housing Assistance in Broward County.
- \$3.3 million for the Aging Resource Centers, formerly known as the Area Agencies on Aging.
- \$42.3 million to increase the nursing home staffing ratio to an average of 2.9 hours of direct care per resident per day. This will give Florida one of the highest ratios in the nation, and will provide a higher quality of care. Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed the other side of the equation, \$91 million which would have provided an increase in nursing home rates and a restoration of prior rate reductions. It's only fair that the state's reimbursements to nursing homes come close to the actual cost of care and Florida's do not at the current time.
- \$24.5 million to serve additional clients from the developmental services waitlist and clients in crisis. The budget also included a 3% rate increase for developmental service providers and a 7% increase for support coordinators, again the first increase in many years. In addition, foster children with developmental disabilities will now be placed at the top of the wait list for waiver services, with the exception of those clients deemed to be in crisis.
- \$300,000 to fund the Holocaust Reference Library at the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center in Broward County.
- \$100,000 for the Hispanic Unity Renacer Seniors Program

The 2006-07 Budget

One of the most challenging obligations the Legislature must perform is balancing and passing the State Budget. In fact, according to our State Constitution, passing a budget is the only mandated requirement of the Legislature. As in previous years, I have set priorities on the areas I believe are of greatest concern to my constituents – improving our schools, children and family issues, and ensuring the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. This budget, while not perfect, does address all of those issues.

Fiscal Year 2006-2007 State Budget – \$71.3 Billion



NAN RICH
Your State Senator

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Legislative 2006 UPDATE

SENATOR NAN RICH • DISTRICT 34

Proudly Serving Parts of Broward & Miami-Dade Counties

Dear Constituent,

The 2006 Legislative session ended at midnight on May 5th. It was intense and unusually political due to the Republicans' internal battle over Senate leadership. Personally, it was very rewarding because legislation was passed and dollars were appropriated in the 2006-2007 state budget for issues and services that are important to all Floridians.

Property insurance, school vouchers, and class size were high profile issues. The Governor and Senate leadership attempted in vain to place constitutional voucher and class-size amendments on the November ballot. Fortunately for Florida, a strong coalition of both Democratic and Republican Senators defeated the Joint Resolution that would have weakened the class size amendment that had been overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2002.

In an effort to sweeten acceptance of the amendment for voters, the resolution would have restricted 65% of every school district's funding to use only in classrooms. While it sounds great on the surface, the amendment sponsors had given no thought to what would actually be included in the 65% direct classroom expenditures. When questions were asked regarding essential elements of a school program such as librarians, psychologists, and transportation, the answer was "trust us." After watching what the legislature did to undermine the voter-mandated amendment for high quality universal Pre-K, I don't think so!

Another Joint Resolution would have allowed for unlimited expansion of school vouchers. The Florida Supreme Court has already declared the "opportunity scholarship" voucher program unconstitutional. But the Governor along with Republican leadership attempted to reinstitute the program via the State Constitution. It met the same fate as the class-size Joint Resolution – it failed to garner the 3/5ths vote required for it to be placed on the November ballot.

Both of these attempted constitutional amendments would have seriously undermined the future of quality public education in Florida.

I hope that you will take a moment to read my newsletter to learn about some of the other legislative issues we addressed this session. Please contact my office with any questions or concerns. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you in the Florida Senate.

Sincerely,

Nan Rich
State Senator, District 34

*Photo at the top left:
Senator Nan Rich with her
page, Marla Borkson.*

Funding for Our Schools

This was heralded as a very “rich” year for education and it was for most school districts. Broward will receive an additional \$122 million and Miami-Dade will receive \$137 million, representing 7.53% and 6.25% increases respectively. However, many of the school districts in Florida will receive 10-12% increases with a state average of 8.69%. Unfortunately, Broward ranked 66th out of 67 districts and Miami-Dade was last.

For the past three years, the state has been trying to distribute funding so that districts receive the same total funding per student regardless of cost of living factors in different areas of the state. Eliminating the District Cost Differential (DCD) formula and equalizing the Local Discretionary Millage both work against South Florida school funding and serve to minimize increases for Broward and Miami-Dade.

In Broward, \$60 million of the new dollars is earmarked to hire more teachers to help reduce class size and \$15 million is reserved for the new performance pay program called STAR. That leaves a balance of \$47 million to cover all teacher salary increases, and additional cost for health insurance, utilities, gasoline, and skyrocketing property insurance!

In a year of increased funding for schools, the great irony is that Broward and Miami-Dade have had to tighten their budgets to avoid short falls. My hope is that next session a new Governor and Legislature will recognize that it costs more to live, work, and educate children in South Florida.



Affordable housing is a major issue in communities across the state as workers who provide essential services, such as law enforcement officers, teachers, nurses, firefighters and others, are priced out of the housing market. We passed legislation that begins to address this critical issue in a significant way by implementing a number of revisions to Florida's affordable housing programs and addressing related land use and regulatory issues. The legislation authorizes school and special districts, like a hospital district, to provide housing assistance to employed personnel. Approximately \$760 million was appropriated to address the housing crisis, including \$250 million to help Floridians retrofit and hurricane-proof their homes.



The Florida Comprehensive Hurricane Mitigation Program will help Floridians strengthen their homes against hurricanes and reduce hurricane exposure in our state. Matching grants up to \$5,000 are available for specific home improvements identified in a home inspection report prepared by a state-approved inspector. The completed inspection does not automatically guarantee that a homeowner will receive a grant, but it does offer qualified homeowners the opportunity to apply for the grant funding. Please check the Department of Financial Services' new website at www.mysafefloridahome.com for detailed instructions about eligibility for free home inspections and how to apply for the grants. This new program is expected to be operational by August.



Private Property Rights

In response to last year's U.S. Supreme Court decision that local governments may condemn private property for economic development, legislation passed limiting the ability of local government to condemn property for the sole purpose of economic development. This constitutional amendment to protect private property rights will appear on the November ballot.



My Bills That Passed

The following is a list of my bills that passed the Legislature this session.

- **HB 7173 (CS/SB 1798)** makes numerous changes to the program for youth who “age out” of foster care, referred to as Independent Living or the Road to Independence (RTI) Program. The bill expands eligibility for the program, requires additional case planning for implementing independent living services, and creates the Office of Child Abuse Prevention within the Executive Office of the Governor. **But the most important change enables all 18 and 19 year olds who are eligible for the RTI Program to receive health care coverage through Medicaid.**
- **SB 1859** adds marriage and family therapists to the list of professionals who may execute a certificate for involuntary examination (Baker Act).
- **HB 329** gives the Department of Children and Families(DCF) the ability to act in the interest of vulnerable adults when the investigation includes self-neglect.
- **HB 1247 (CS/SB 2226)** expands the waiver serving children who are diagnosed with Familial Dysautonomia (a rare genetic disease similar to Cystic Fibrosis) to include adults.
- **HB 67 (CS/SB 262)** provides for grants to youth athletic organizations for Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs). The bill was strongly advocated by parents whose children died because an AED was not available.
- **SB 1590** is a Sales Tax Allowance Bill that allows sales and use tax dealers to elect to donate their collection allowance to the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund. The money will be used to upgrade technology in public schools within the county where the dollars were donated.
- **HB 241 (SB 972)** mandates implementation of the full-pay option for the Medikids program, a component of KidCare serving children 1-4 years old. Families 200% above the Federal Poverty Level will have the opportunity to buy into KidCare, as they may do now in the Healthy Kids program for children 5-18. Additionally, \$1 million was appropriated for community-based outreach to expand KidCare enrollment.
- **Co-Teaching** – My bill permitting the continuation of co-teaching in our public schools was included in the comprehensive education package. Co-teaching will continue to be used in calculating class size requirements, and criteria were established to insure a qualified team of teachers.

Funding Issues

By serving on the Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee, I was able to play an active role in securing significant dollars for important human services both statewide and in Broward County. Some funding issues in which I played a major role included:

- \$20 million increase to Community Based Care lead agencies to improve equity for foster care and related services across the state.
- \$5.1 million workload-increase for the Independent Living Program for youth “aging out” of the foster care system.
- \$6.5 million rate increase for foster care parents, the first in many years.
- \$5 million for Early Steps, a statewide program for children 0-3 years old with developmental disabilities, will improve the quality and intensity of services for families with infants and toddlers with developmental delays and handi-capping conditions. It is the first increase in over 5 years.
- \$11 million new dollars to serve at-risk pregnant women, infants and children through Healthy Start Coalitions across the state.
- \$1.4 million to fund Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY), programs throughout the state that teach parents to be their children's first educators.
- \$975,000 to fund a Residential Center at Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Options (JAFCO) for foster children with developmental disabilities.
- \$4.7 million increase to serve 500 new clients on the Aging and Disabled Adults waiver waiting list, the first increase in 8 years.

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